Evaluation Criteria

Each habitat restoration opportunity was given a score through the Habitat Action Team's ranking process. (Total points possible: 57) Below are the criteria used in the process. For a more detailed description of the ranking process, see the Habitat Restoration Documentation Report.

- **Quality of existing habitat**. This criterion assessed whether the habitat opportunity would be located in a degraded or non-habitat area, moderately functioning, or high quality functioning habitat.
- **Restoration time frame.** The amount of time needed for the site to be restored. Those sites expected to be restored relatively quickly (i.e., within one to five years) received a higher score than sites that could take longer to restore.
- **Opportunity to improve ecosystem function.** An opportunity could potentially be designed to provide for a variety of habitats for a variety of species. Opportunities very near or within the inner Bay estuaries tended to score higher because of the potential to restore or enhance several functions within the bay's estuaries.
- **Site protection.** This criterion considered whether there was an opportunity to permanently protect the habitat site after the identified opportunity is implemented.
- **Sediment deposition/transport processes.** This criterion considered whether a habitat opportunity would affect or be supported by sediment accretion or erosion, bathymetry, and/or hydrologic transport process that are important in maintaining physical characteristics of habitats.
- **Threatened and endangered species.** This criterion evaluated the extent to which a habitat opportunity could benefit threatened or endangered species. For example, habitat opportunities that provide an increase in in-water intertidal benches and marine buffer particularly in estuaries with salmon bearing creeks tended to score higher than opportunities that involved the removal of remnant structures.
- **Probability of success.** This criterion relates to the probability of success of a habitat opportunity based on demonstrated mitigation and restoration techniques used primarily in the marine and estuarine environment.
- **Habitat connectivity.** This criterion was defined as the extent to which a habitat opportunity provided habitat connectivity to other habitat areas. For example a habitat restoration opportunity at the mouth of an estuary could provide habitat connectivity to downstream nearshore and deeper open water habitat, adjacent nearshore habitat parallel to the shoreline, or to upstream habitat.
- **Restore/replace limited habitat.** This criterion related to whether a habitat opportunity would replace or restore limited habitat. Limited habitat includes habitats that historically were present in Bellingham Bay but have been lost through alterations over many years. Examples of limited habitat in Bellingham Bay include intertidal mud/sandflat habitat, saltmarsh habitat and eelgrass beds.
- **Sustainability of habitat functions.** This criterion evaluated the sustainability of an opportunity once implemented. For example, certain opportunities such as removing remnant structures would require no operation and maintenance (O&M) Removing fill to re-establish saltmarsh requires some ongoing O&M until the saltmarsh is self-sustaining.

- **Type of habitat replacement.** This criterion relates primarily to regulatory requirements or guidelines for habitat replacement. Typically natural resource regulatory agencies prefer habitat restoration projects that replace habitat and functions that are going to be impacted by a development activity. Since in-water disposal of contaminated sediments is a very possible scenario in Bellingham Bay, this criterion was included to assess whether a habitat restoration opportunity could achieve in-kind replacement for impacts that may occur if in-water sediment disposal occurs.
- **Timing of implementation.** This criterion relates primarily to timing of implementation of a habitat opportunity relative to in-water sediment disposal. It was used to assess whether a habitat opportunity could be implemented in advance of, concurrent with, or after an in-water disposal action.